

“Bring...the Books...Especially the Parchments”

By DR. ALVA J. McCLAIN

President of Grace Theological Seminary

Dr. B. R. Lacy, Jr., president of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Va., says that some 25 years ago he heard Dr. Walter W. Moore preach a sermon on the text in II Timothy 4:13, “... Bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.” Dr. Lacy adds that while he never had the privilege of seeing either the manuscript or notes of the sermon, after the passing of a quarter of a century he still remembered the three main points in the sermon, as follows:

1. Paul was *lonely*. This was his final imprisonment, and his friends had deserted him. He longed for his “dearly beloved son” and urged, “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me.”

2 Paul was *cold*. Winter was approaching, the Mamertine dungeon was damp, and Paul’s blood at 70 was not as rich and warm as in other years. “Come before winter,” he urged, and “the cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee.”

3. Paul was *hungry*. This hunger was not physical but intellectual and spiritual. His request was not for bread and wine, but for “the books, but especially the parchments.” The “parchments,” according to Dr. Moore, were the sacred Scriptures, written on the most durable and expensive material. The “books” constituted Paul’s private library, and supplemented the holy writings.

Other scholars of note agree with Dr. Moore’s identification of these “books” and “parchments” for which the apostle desired. The “books” would be papyrus rolls in use for ordinary purposes, while the more costly “parchments” contained, in all likelihood, portions of the Hebrew Scriptures (Exp. Grk. N. T.). Spence thinks the “books” were probably a few choice works “exegetical and explanatory” of the Jewish Scriptures (Ellicott’s Com.). As to the “parchments,” Dr. Robertson remarks that they were most likely “copies of Old Testament books,” or “possibly even copies of Christ’s sayings.” It cannot be far wrong, therefore, to see in Paul’s touching words a desire to have with him in the prison both the written Word of God and also a few choice commentaries on the Word, but especially the former. Whatever the case may be, we know certain things about the Apostle Paul:

First, Paul was a *learned* man. After all that his modern enemies have done to minimize his learning, it is still the verdict of careful scholarship that “he was master of all the education and the opportunities of his time. He turned to his profit and to the advancement of his great purpose all the resources of civilization” (Ramsey, in *Pauline and Other Studies*).

Second, Paul was a *lover of books*. Whatever view one may take regarding the meaning of the expressions in the text of this article, it is certain that Paul to the end of his days on earth prized highly his books. The very request he made of Timothy, and the circumstances under which it was made, indicate unmistakably that all his life he had been a lover of books. And it needs

scarcely to be said that this is the mark of an educated man. The minister who loves and reads books will succeed even though he may not have the advantages of formal education.

Third, Paul used what he learned in books. There is not the space here to attempt any lengthy proof of this assertion. But it is generally agreed that in his writings and speeches, Paul clearly reveals that he is familiar not only with the Scriptures but also with the literature of the world in which he lived. In I Corinthians 15:33 there is a practical maxim from Menander. In Acts 17:28 Paul actually quotes words which are found in the writings of two Greeks, the poet Aratus and the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes. And in Titus 1:12 he quotes against the Cretians a satire from Epimenides. These references are not therefore less inspired than other parts of Scripture, because in every case the Holy Spirit guided the writers of Scripture in their selection of material and even their choice of words. But as a rule the Spirit worked within the personal vocabularies in these choices, so that it is easy to distinguish between the literary styles of the different writers.

Fourth, Paul’s hearers recognized his learning. There is testimony on this point both from within and outside the church. Peter refers to some of the things written by Paul as “hard to be understood” which they that are “unlearned” wrest to their own destruction. During one of Paul’s great messages delivered before the King Agrippa, the Roman Festus interrupted with a loud voice, “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad” (Acts 26:24). As Robertson points out, “much learning” here is literally “many letters.” We still speak of an educated man even today as a “man of letters,” or a “man of books,” a figure of speech in which we describe a man’s learning by naming the source of it.

Fifth, Paul kept on reading to the end of his life. Many a man of great learning tapers off in his eagerness to read and learn as the years pass. It was not so with Paul. One might easily suppose that after a lifetime of arduous toil and suffering for the Gospel’s sake, now shut up in a Roman prison awaiting death, the apostle might think of other things. On the contrary, we see this greatest missionary and preacher of all time setting up a theological library in his prison cell.

From its very beginning, Grace Seminary has made “the parchments”—the written Word of God—central in our ministry; and around this Word the Seminary has gathered “the books” which would best enable the students to understand the great truths of the Bible and preach them to our generation. We deeply appreciate the ministry of the Women’s Missionary Council in their worthy project of adding substantially to “the books” of the Seminary library. We can think of nothing more helpful and worth while. In coming days the students here will read these books and thus come to be under God more sufficient as preachers of THE BOOK.